

# The Incorporation of Social Organizations under the MAS in Bolivia

by  
Angus McNelly

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*By drawing on the theoretical framework of the second incorporation of heterogeneous social organizations by progressive governments through informal contestation and/or technocratic implementation of their demands in Latin America, this article argues that the first presidential term of Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006–2009) was marked by the incorporation of combative social movements through both a multidimensional co-optation of movements and the technocratic competition of the central movement demands for the nationalization of gas and the rewriting of the constitution through a constituent assembly. However, by 2010, this incorporation had stripped social movements of their ability to mobilize for change and the political conjuncture had shifted, making the government less dependent on its social bases to maintain political stability. This simultaneously transformed movements into defensive movements protecting the gains from the previous period and state–social–movement relations into informal contestatory regimes in which movements could only struggle against proposed political agendas.*

*En base a un marco teórico que abarca la segunda incorporación de organizaciones sociales heterogéneas por parte de gobiernos progresistas a través de la contestación informal y/o la implementación tecnocrática de sus demandas en América Latina, un análisis del proyecto político de Evo Morales en Bolivia sostiene que su primer mandato presidencial se vio caracterizado por la incorporación de movimientos sociales combativos a través de una cooptación multidimensional de dichos movimientos y la competencia tecnocrática de las demandas del movimiento central en torno a la nacionalización del gas y la modificación de la constitución por una asamblea constituyente. Sin embargo, para 2010, esta incorporación había despojado a los movimientos sociales de su capacidad de movilizarse a favor del cambio y la coyuntura política había cambiado, haciendo que el gobierno dependiera menos de sus bases sociales para mantener la estabilidad política. Esto transformó a los movimientos en entidades defensivas dedicadas a proteger las ganancias del período anterior y las relaciones entre el estado y los movimientos sociales en regímenes informales de impugnación dentro de los cuales los movimientos mismos sólo podían luchar contra las agendas políticas propuestas.*

**Keywords:** *Pink tide, Social movements, Bolivia, Evo Morales, Progressive governments*

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There is little debate that the conditions permitting the ascent to power of Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, were created by the cycle of social mobilization between the years 2000 and 2005 (Farthing and Kohl, 2014;

Angus McNelly is a lecturer in Latin American politics at Queen Mary University of London. He completed his Ph.D. on working-class experiences of Evo Morales's government in Bolivia in Spring 2019.

Hylton and Thomson, 2007; Webber, 2011). Mobilizations against the privatization of water galvanized widespread protests from a coalition of urban and rural forces, first in Cochabamba in 2000 and later in El Alto in 2004. In the rural *altiplano* (highland plateau), the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Confederation of Peasant Unions—CSUTCB) orchestrated three years of low-intensity protests, which rumbled on during the period after Cochabamba's water war (Gutiérrez, 2014). However, it was the struggles for the nationalization of hydrocarbons and against the proposal to export Bolivian gas through Chilean seaports that were most influential, toppling not one but two national governments (Spronk and Webber, 2007). Morales's political party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement toward Socialism—MAS), was an active participant, albeit not the protagonist, in some of these struggles. Being the political instrument of the CSUTCB and having a *cocalero* (coca grower) as its leader later led commentators and party officials alike to argue that the MAS had an apparent *organic* relationship with social movements.

Over the Morales years (2006–2019), many authors have studied state–social-movement relations under the MAS government. Particularly, there was a spate of excellent intellectual production after the dust from Morales's action-packed first term (2006–2009) had settled, with the constituent assembly, struggles over departmental autonomy and indigenous autonomy, agrarian reform, and a series of nationalizations giving scholars and commentators ample material to dissect. Most scholars were particularly interested in whether the MAS government represented a break from the previous period—a new form of politics—and whether the discourse of “a government of social movements” had transformed state–society relations (see Escárzaga, 2012; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Zuazo, 2010). Many of the most interesting debates situated the domestic Bolivian dynamics within the broader left turn in Latin America, a moment that Federico Rossi and Eduardo Silva (2018) labeled the “second incorporation of social organizations” because of organizations' newfound importance under progressive governments. With the end of Latin America's pink tide<sup>1</sup> and the controversial end to Morales's time in government when he was ousted on November 10, 2019 (see McNelly, 2019a), the imperative has shifted as the Latin American left and its sympathizers elsewhere scramble to work out where it all went wrong and to evaluate the gains, limitations, and legacy of the pink tide.

To this end, in this article I address the dynamics of the incorporation of social movements into the government of the MAS, examining its impacts on the politics of these movements. The first four years of the second incorporation in Bolivia, I contend, were marked by offensive social movements forcing the government into technocratic policy responses to demands.<sup>2</sup> During this initial period of the MAS, movement incorporation had three dimensions: (1) co-optation from above, (2) the creation of parallel social organizations by the government, and (3) the propensity of social organizations to be co-opted. The central demands of the radical social movements of the previous period 2000–2005 were incorporated into the government's project, consolidating the position of the MAS government and stripping movements of their most powerful collective mobilizing frames. By 2010, the dynamics of social movement

incorporation had led to a loss of independent mobilizing capabilities, creative capacity, and militancy, and organizations found themselves left only with the power to reject government policies through informal contestation.

What follows is drawn from 17 months of fieldwork in Bolivia between January 2016 and May 2017, where I spent time marching and protesting with movements of various stripes and interviewing their leaders. I also attended many of the MAS-organized School of Political Formation sessions in the city of El Alto between July 2016 and January 2017.<sup>3</sup> My argument begins by sketching my theoretical framework, drawing on the second-incorporation approach developed by Rossi and Silva. I then discuss the rise of the MAS and the three dimensions of movement incorporation under the MAS. I explore how the incorporation of social movement demands of the nationalization of gas in 2006 and the constituent assembly process in 2007–2008 demobilized the movements, reorienting them as defenders of the government. Finally, I examine the forms of state–social–movement relations in the post-2009 period.

## THE SECOND INCORPORATION OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

In order to unpack the dialectical interplay between processes of incorporation and co-optation of social movements and the political strength and radical horizons of these movements, I draw on the work of Rossi and Silva (2018) on the second incorporation in Latin America. Rossi and Silva build upon the pathbreaking work of Collier and Collier (1991) on the incorporation of the labor movement in Latin America in order to address the different forms of social movement incorporation during the pink tide. Rossi (2018: 24) contends that, while the first incorporation of social sectors into the state in Latin America under the populist leaders of the mid-twentieth century occurred through labor unions and affected mainly the urban, formalized working classes, neoliberalism galvanized the fragmentation of Latin American societies and the emergence of new social movements that politicized different axes of contestation: territory, identity, and race. This, he argues, created a scenario in which the incorporation of social organizations was more varied than previously.

During Latin America's pink tide, the incorporation of popular sectors struggling from below into the state was a multifaceted process that differed from country to country because of the heterogeneous popular-sector landscapes produced by neoliberalism (Rossi and Silva, 2018: 9). This second incorporation, Silva (2018a: 310) argues, was a "process of recognition and inclusion of popular sectors and subaltern groups' interests, as well as frequently but not always their organizations in the political arena." The left governments of Latin America's pink tide, he contends, included popular sectors in their political projects through segmented popular-interest intermediation regimes. Because of the variegated character and political importance of different popular-sector groups, governments, often on an ad hoc basis, built different incorporation mechanisms for different groups shaped by the institutional capacity of the state. As well as more traditional forms of incorporation (such as clientelism), these segmented regimes also included new forms of incorporation—state

managerialism and informal contestation. In the former, left governments recognized popular-sector demands and formulated technocratic policy responses without the input of the affected sectors, while in the latter they announced policy that galvanized protests by the affected groups, with both sides eventually entering into direct negotiations (313).

Building on this frame, Silva (2018b: 57) argues that “the organic connection between the MAS leadership and its core social movement organizations shaped ideational frames that stressed the direct inclusion of those movements in the political arena.” For Rossi and Silva (2018: 13), “Bolivia is mainly a case of political incorporation from below, which occurs when political parties organically created by social movement organizations are the principal vehicles of incorporation.” This perspective overlooks the different modalities of incorporation of social movements and how they changed over the period of Morales’s tenure. I argue that the second incorporation in Bolivia was initially marked by the technocratic incorporation of social movement demands and the appointment of movement leaders to government positions. However, the dynamics of the incorporation and implementation of movement demands within the political conjuncture of this period reoriented social movements from offensive movements pushing for change and able to propose policy to defensive movements allied with the government.

Despite the social movement origins of the MAS, this was not for all movements, as Silva (2018b: 57) suggests, an *organic* process—social movements did not autonomically become the social base of the MAS—but was marked by concerted efforts by the MAS government to co-opt, neutralize, and realign movements as the government’s support base. The MAS was by and large successful in these endeavors; nonetheless, movements retained the power to reject policies that they opposed through informal contestation. Thus, although both state managerialism and informal contestation are present in Bolivia, state managerialism predominated during Morales’s first term, whereas informal contestation prevailed in the period following 2010. The remainder of the article is dedicated to showing why this is the case.

## **BUILDING THE GOVERNMENT OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS (2006–2009)**

Evo Morales and the MAS assumed office in early 2006, having won the first majority in national elections since Bolivia’s return to democracy in 1982. The social movements—both rural and urban—that had been radicalized and accumulated political consciousness during the previous period turned out in massive numbers to vote for the MAS.

There are a number of different social movement currents in Bolivia. Following the national revolution of 1952, the labor movement became a central political force through the foundation of the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers’ Central—COB), with blue-collar, white-collar, public-sector, and private-sector workers from almost all sectors being drawn together under the radical leadership of the miners (García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje, 2004: 37). The COB was a key actor in the struggles against the dictatorships and for the

return to democracy in the 1970s (Zavaleta, 2013), although it was decimated by neoliberal reforms during the 1980s (Kruse, 2001: 155).

The highland and lowland indigenous movements increased in importance from the late 1970s on. The highland Katarista movement coalesced into the CSUTCB (see Van Cott, 2005), which drew in different indigenous groups from across the altiplano and the valleys of Cochabamba (Rivera, 2003). It affiliated itself with the COB almost immediately after its inception, becoming a significant political movement on the national stage, with the cocalero movement forming its radical core in the face of increasing state persecution (García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje, 2004). However, the shift away from class as an axis of contestation under neoliberalism caused a crisis in the CSUTCB. Ethnicity became the new axis of contention, and indigenous movements started to move toward a more “authentic” indigeneity (Lucero, 2009: 67). In this context, the Confederación Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (National Confederation of *Ayllus* and *Markas* of Qullasuyu—CONAMAQ) was formed in 1997. The lowland indigenous movement had a slightly different trajectory, initially eschewing national politics in favor of a regional agenda. Formed in the 1980s, the Central Indígena del Oriente de Bolivia (Indigenous Central of Eastern Bolivia—CIDOB) broke onto the national stage through a series of marches in defense of indigenous territory during the 1990s. CIDOB was successful in garnering international support and negotiating with neoliberal governments (Lucero, 2009: 67), although it (along with the CONAMAQ) was a marginal figure in the movements that brought Morales to power.

The MAS emerged during the 1990s as the political instrument of the CSUTCB. Morales himself rose through the ranks of the cocalero federations based in the Chapare, the semitropical valleys of the coca-growing region in the department of Cochabamba, and the cocaleros initially viewed the MAS as an extension of their federations (Grisaffi, 2013). Until 2002, the MAS was largely a rural-based party with little institutional structure, drawing support from the cocaleros and informal workers (Farthing, 2018: 8). By 2005, however, it had positioned itself as the representative and mediator of popular, indigenous, and working-class movements and the representative of the social movements of the 2000–2005 cycle of revolt (Tapia, 2011: 111), containing nationalist, Marxist, and indigenista currents (Farthing, 2018: 9). This led Vice President Álvaro García Linera to pronounce the MAS a “government of social movements.”

Following the radical protests of 2000–2005, social movements were able to force the MAS to incorporate a wide range of actors and demands. During the first four years of the MAS government, there were three moments of the incorporation of social movements into the state. First, the integration of individual social movement leaders into the government administration has been an important facet of the MAS government. In an attempt to mediate and offer representation to the different interests of what was undoubtedly a broad church, the MAS offered a quota of government positions—known as *pegas*—to each social organization (do Alto and Stefanoni, 2010: 330–332). This was an aspect of one of its central concepts, the “decolonization” of the state, which it



understood as giving voice to the historically oppressed (Jorge Silva, Consejo Municipal de La Paz, interview, La Paz, September 26, 2016):

Already with the election of Evo Morales, historically excluded sectors became the new actors making political decisions in this country thanks to the importance of social organizations . . . that represent the large majority of a people that have been historically marginalized. Here we have [the indigenous organizations from the altiplano] Túpac Katari and Bartolina Sisa, FENCOMIN [cooperative miners' federation], the cocaleros, coffee growers, the colonizers (who are now known as the interculturals).<sup>4</sup> This is a coalition of social organizations that represent these sectors, these social classes that had been "under the table," and forms a part of what we understand as a process of decolonization.

The pegas offered to social movements shaped the character of the MAS government at first and gave movements the power to implement their demands as government policy (Espinoza, 2015: 129). Ten out of 16 ministers of Morales's first cabinet were drawn from social organizations including the COB, the Federación de las Juntas Vecinales de El Alto (Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto—FEJUVE-El Alto), the Federación Nacional de Cooperativas Mineras (National Federation of Cooperative Miners—FENCOMIN), the domestic workers' union, and the indigenous sectors (Espinoza, 2015: 133).

Many more social movement actors were drafted into the mid-level state bureaucracy, with the size of the state administration ballooning from 38,000 public functionaries in 2001 to over 297,000 in 2013 (Soruco, Franco, and Durán, 2014: 40). In their study of three government departments within the plurinational bureaucracy, Ximena Soruco, Daniela Franco, and Mariela Duráns (2014: 121) found that increasing numbers of state functionaries were women, indigenous people, or members of the popular classes and highlighted the appearance, on a massive scale, of functionaries drawn from social organizations (37 percent of their sample). This mid-level incorporation was uneven, with the CSUTCB particularly benefiting thanks to the genesis of the MAS as its political instrument (do Alto and Stefanoni, 2010: 333). However, leaders from the COB, the FEJUVEs across the departmental capitals and El Alto, the market guilds, and the transport unions were all given opportunities, with movement leaders filling ministerial, departmental, and municipal government posts.

Co-optation of social organization leaders was accompanied by the second dimension of state-society relations under the MAS: the creation of government-sponsored parallel organizations. The institutional relationship between government-aligned social movements and the MAS was formalized by the creation of the Viceministeria para la Coordinación con Movimientos Sociales y Sociedad Civil (Vice-Ministry for the Coordination with Social Movements and Civil Society—VMCMSSC) in February 2006 and the Coordinador Nacional Pro Cambio (National Coordinator pro Change—CONALCAM) in January 2007. CONALCAM was designed to "give content" to the government's claim to be a "government of social movements" (Zuazo, 2010: 130) and the mechanism through which social movements would participate in Bolivian politics: "CONALCAM will come to be not only a space of social control but also a space

where social demands are presented, laws are agreed, measures against militants or leaders who generate conflict or division are decided, new leaders are formed, and actions to defend Evo Morales are coordinated" (*La Razón*, 2010). These two new entities effectively institutionalized the relationships between social movements and the MAS government to garner popular support and formalize the informal contestatory element of its segmented popular-interest-intermediation regime. This was an important part of the changing nature of the relationship between the MAS and social movements, stifling the creative power of independent movements and limiting their ability to set the agenda from below. Displacing organic alliances as the recognized voice of indigenous social movements (Salazar, 2015: 202), these two new state instruments became mechanisms to control and direct struggles to advance the political goals of the MAS or otherwise resolve social conflict quickly and efficiently. They were not a means to foster the transformative potential of social struggle (Mokrani, 2009: 207).

The third dimension to state-society relations under the MAS government is the experiences from below of the social organizations themselves. The roots of the MAS as a political instrument of the highland indigenous movement, its involvement (however peripheral) in the cycle of social mobilizations, and the indigeneity of President Evo Morales made many movements believe that they were now in power: "Evo came to power. . . . Now *we* are in power. . . . Now the Aymara and Quechua [are in power]. We are more than 65 percent of the population, and no one is going to arrive at power through a coup d'état, because we know that we are going to govern eternally" (participant in the School of Political Formation, El Alto, June 28, 2016). Access to government jobs was more than mere top-down co-optation. It was also a key social movement demand. "Now it's our turn" was commonly heard in the social movement during this period, and the election of the MAS brought an expectation that social movement delegates would be given positions in the administration (Farthing, 2018: 9). As the political theorist and former director of the Central of Social Investigation (CIS), Jorge Viaña (interview, La Paz, October 31, 2016), said:

There are people that only see co-optation, the tutelage, the subordination, and after the clientelism political bribes [*prebendalismo*], and this is a Manichean view of history. In other words, there are not only absolute executioners and absolute victims. . . . If we are talking about power and decision making, the powerful movements of 2000 to 2005, they also have a history and a tendency to be co-opted.

Viaña's perspective captures the multiple dynamics of incorporation and slow reduction of radical possibilities of challenges to capitalist modes of accumulation and the capitalist state over time. "Conservative processes that weaken progressive advancements," Viaña (2012: 389) argues, "are strengthened through processes of alienation *in both society and the state*" (my emphasis).

Focusing only on the state or society separately—analyzing the co-optation of social movements simply from the side of the MAS—is insufficient. In lay terms, the optimism surrounding the MAS and its position as "the government of social movements," coupled with pragmatic assessments of what was the

best possible route to (partial) fulfilment of demands such as the nationalization of gas or a constituent assembly, reduced the impetus of social movements to remain mobilized after a series of victories.

The first term of the MAS must be viewed in this light. Together, these three dimensions of incorporation allowed the government to curtail and contain the more radical movement demands from the prior period and transform a broad coalition of social organizations into its party base. While the first two dimensions are relatively straightforward to show empirically, the third dimension presents more of a methodological headache. However, the dynamics and perceptions of the implementation of movement demands offer a window through which this final dimension can be examined.

### **STATE MANAGERIALISM, SOCIAL MOVEMENT VICTORIES, AND THE REGIONAL AUTONOMY AGENDA (2006–2009)**

Two important moments in the first term of the MAS help explain the tendency of social organizations to be co-opted by Morales's government: the technocratic incorporation of social movement demands into the political project of the MAS and right-wing destabilization tactics through the regional autonomy agenda. Shifts and struggles on the broader political landscape are a vital part of puzzle of state–social-movement relations—the internal dynamics of social movements alone do not have the power to explain the alignment of movements under the MAS (Mokrani and Chávez, 2012: 381).

#### **INCORPORATING SOCIAL MOVEMENT DEMANDS: THE NATIONALIZATION OF GAS**

The first moment aligning social movements with the political project of the MAS was the ostensible completion of the most radical demands of the social movements through state managerialism, including the 2007 agrarian reform and the 2010 creation of indigenous autonomies, the 2006 nationalization of gas, and the 2006–2008 rewriting of the constitution through a popular constituent assembly.

The nationalization of gas was one of the central demands of the social movements of the gas wars in 2003 and 2005, the epicenter of which was the city of El Alto (Spronk and Webber, 2007). In fact, such was the power of this collective action frame that, according to Ben Kohl and Linda Farthing (2006: 6), “Gas has spawned the Andean equivalent of a cargo cult, transformed from a commodity to a magical resource in the national imaginary.” Social movement leaders proved to be masters of animating political action through this collective action frame, pushing gas center stage in Bolivian politics (Kohl and Farthing, 2012: 229).

On May 1, 2006, the MAS government announced the fulfillment of this demand through a theatrical military occupation of the Margarita gas fields in the Chaco region of southern Bolivia (Farthing and Kohl, 2014: 38). The Supreme Decree giving producers the right to commercialization at the point of extraction was declared unconstitutional by the Morales regime, allowing



the government to renegotiate exportation contracts (and a higher export price of gas) with Argentina and Brazil (Kaup, 2010: 129). The government then announced a temporary royalties and taxation regime, allowing the government to capture 82 percent of hydrocarbon profits while it negotiated 44 new contracts with 12 petroleum companies, including the biggest players, Petrobras and Repsol (Webber, 2011: 81).

The nationalization of hydrocarbons was in a sense a faux nationalization, since the state did not appropriate any property of transnational companies. The new contracts signed in October 2006 contained shared production elements of the 2005 Hydrocarbons Law 3058, which positioned the state as an overseer of production while private capital “executes the entirety of its operations at its own expense and receives direct payment defined in relation to recuperation of costs, prices, volumes, and investments” (Webber, 2011: 82). The upshot of this contractual arrangement was that the control of production stayed in the hands of multinational companies, with Petrobras and Repsol actually increasing their share of production (Arze and Gómez, 2013: 80).

The technocratic incorporation of the radical demand of gas nationalization enabled the MAS government to win the support of sections of social movements in El Alto while simultaneously stripping more radical factions of one of their central mobilizing frames. On my travels among the social organizations in El Alto, the nationalization of gas was expounded as one of the primary achievements of the MAS government (Julian, FEJUVE–El Alto leader, interview, El Alto, April 18, 2016):

For years we suffered. We did not understand what gas, petroleum, and hydrocarbons were, much less that we have lots here in Bolivia, so previous politicians chose to take it for themselves and to sell it to other countries at a very low price. Nobody understood then, but little by little we taught ourselves its importance. Now, we have captured [*pescado*] what gas, petroleum, and everything were, no?

Even the leader of the anti-MAS FEJUVE–El Alto used nationalization as one of the few successes of the MAS (counterposed with what he argued was the failure of the MAS government to industrialize) (Benigno Siñani, interview, El Alto, October 19, 2016). For many, nationalization was the base of a transformation of Bolivia from a poor country into a country with natural resource wealth, a perspective encapsulated by Cecilia Blanco Romero and Christian Esteves (interviews, El Alto, July 15, 2016):

I am very thankful to our president because Bolivia has changed and now we are not poor. . . . We are not poor thanks to our president Evo Morales.

Before, the government submitted to the will of the United States. Today, our government, thanks to the struggles of the social organizations in the previous period, thanks to *compañero* Morales, no longer submits to [the will of] the United States.

These comments demonstrate that in El Alto (and beyond), the nationalization of gas came to be associated with past actions of social movements and the

president himself. The government presented the demand for the nationalization of gas as fulfilled and the movements struggling for it as relics of a bygone era. The effect of this, in short, was to strip the demand for the nationalization of gas of the radical potential it once held.

#### INCORPORATING SOCIAL MOVEMENT DEMANDS: THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

The second social movement demand incorporated into the political project of the MAS was the demand for a constituent assembly. Originating from lowland indigenous movements during the 1990s (Schavelzon, 2012: 4), the idea was taken up by the social movements of the period 2000–2005 simultaneously with the popular democracy of the open-air meetings (*cabildos*) used to organize and sustain protest. The constituent assembly was conceived as a popular mechanism for indigenous groups to recover self-determination rather than as a mechanism for their integration into the liberal state. National social movements articulated this demand through the Pacto de Unidad (Unity Pact—PU), a coalition of numerous lowland and highland groups.<sup>5</sup> Underpinning the PU's demand for a constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution was the notion of a plurinational reconfiguration of the Bolivian state in which the indigenous, originary, and peasant nations and peoples of Bolivia would have direct representation at all levels of government and powers as collective subjects in accordance with their customary practices (Pacto de Unidad, 2006: 5). Direct and participatory democracy—through mechanisms including communal assemblies, a social organization veto on unpopular policies, and referendums—was positioned alongside the representative democracy of the liberal state, and the three powers of the liberal state (executive, legislative, and judicial) were extended to include “plurinational social power” (6).

Responding to this demand of the social movements, the MAS passed the Law of Convocation of the Constituent Assembly in March 2006, but from the outset the constituent assembly assumed a different form from the one suggested. First, the election of assembly delegates acquired a partisan nature and blocked the participation of social movements (including the PU) as separate collective subjects. This cemented the centrality of the MAS in the constitutional process and forced indigenous groups into alliance with the political party (Iamamoto, 2013: 170–171). This was vital because the MAS did not have proposals of its own and was using the process to generate stability around the nucleus of state power (Salazar, 2015: 199).

Secondly, since the MAS did not control the Bolivian Senate, it was forced to enter into political negotiations with the opposition, limiting the possibility of direct indigenous representation (Schavelzon, 2012: 143–144). Following these compromises, it was agreed that there would be 255 assembly deputies, 210 directly elected through a list system involving the top three candidates from each of the 70 electoral districts and 45 proportionally elected through relative majority (Mokrani and Gutiérrez, 2006). However, the law contained a “minority protection rule” whereby a party could only win a maximum of two (out of three) deputies in each constituency, the final delegate being from a minority party that won over 5 percent of the vote (Mokrani and Gutiérrez, 2006). This clause gave representation to otherwise-excluded far-right groups and denied

the MAS the two-thirds majority needed to approve a prospective constitutional text (Schavelzon, 2012: 146). The MAS won 137 of the 255 delegates, but the political right won 39 percent of the seats, more than the 33 percent they needed to block any proposed text (Mokrani and Gutiérrez, 2006).

Third, the Presidential Representation for the Constituent Assembly, created in March 2006, was dominated by García Linera and positioned itself as the “articulator nucleus” of the PU, transforming the form and content of its proposals to fit liberal constitutional models (Salazar, 2015: 200). This effectively denied the PU an independent voice in the process. Moreover, in January 2007 it created a small group of technocrats from different organizations, the Group of 12, ostensibly to speed up the negotiating process. This small group was only half drawn from the PU, with the other members coming from different MAS delegations (Salazar, 2015: 201). In this way, the MAS was able to position itself as the power within the assembly and sideline the social movement forces, as the words of the CSUTCB leader Isaac Ávalos (quoted in Garcés, 2011: 61) reveal: “We have almost done no work with the Group of 12 because that group is on a different path; they wanted to impose something that we do not agree with. . . . We decided not to work with them and instead to work directly with the commissions of the assembly, the CSUTCB and the PU.” The MAS used the constituent assembly to reinforce the processes of social control that had already begun elsewhere, transforming one of the central demands of radical social movement into a technocratic exercise within the confines of the liberal state (Salazar, 2015; Tapia, 2011). As much is clear when the original proposals of the PU are compared with the form assumed by the constituent assembly and the outcomes achieved. This reduced the ability of leaders and social movements in general to be a genuinely creative force and pushed them toward increasingly aligning themselves in a defensive position behind Morales.

### AUTONOMY BATTLES

The broader political landscape also shaped the realignment of social movements as the defensive force behind the MAS. The election of Morales realized the worst fears of the lowland elite, who amplified their opposition to his government and indigenous and working-class social movements through the notion of autonomy. They increasingly tried to divide the country into two Bolivias: the western highlands region, defined as an Andean *kollo* colonial state, and the “modern,” mestizo eastern lowlands (Schavelzon, 2012: 190–191).

The opposition used a variety of tactics linked to the autonomy agenda to try and derail the constituent assembly and destabilize the Morales government, including marches, assemblies, and hunger strikes, with opposition delegates boycotting the assembly. Santa Cruz unilaterally declared departmental autonomy in December 2006 (Fabricant, 2009: 203). The governor of Cochabamba, Manfred Reyes, attempted to follow suit, provoking widespread violence between government and opposition supporters (Webber, 2011: 111–114). The autonomy movement reached its apogee in August–September 2008. A civic strike on the August 19 in the lowland departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz, and Tarija was accompanied by a wave of violence from the protofascist

Cruceño Youth Union, which spearheaded the violent occupation of 45 institutions across lowland departments and the blockade of the gas pipelines to Argentina and Brazil (Argirakis, 2016: 91–92). On September 11, tens of peasant activists were slaughtered at Porvenir in an attack orchestrated by the prefect of Pando, Leopoldo Fernández, laying bare the autonomist movement's violent and racist nature.

The Porvenir massacre was a point of inflection for the MAS government, representing the complete alignment of social movement forces with the MAS (Salazar, 2015: 156).<sup>6</sup> Throughout the constituent assembly the MAS had called on the social movements to defend the government (Webber, 2011: 95), and by August 2008 they had largely been positioned as defenders of Morales and his government (Kohl, 2010: 111). They emphatically answered Morales's call for a show of support for the MAS government in Cochabamba in early 2007 and again in Sucre later that year, organizing the biggest *cabildo* in Bolivia's history in its defense (Schavelzon, 2012: 244). In response to the Porvenir massacre, the government mobilized social movements through CONALCAM to pressure Congress, forcing the Bolivian bourgeoisie to ally itself (temporarily) with the MAS (Salazar, 2015: 212). Through CONALCAM, the MAS government directed social movements away from further pressuring the elites based in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (a struggle that might have completely defeated the old Cruceño landowners) and toward Congress to ensure that it accepted the constitutional text that García Linera had negotiated with representatives of the opposition behind closed doors during September–October 2008 (Salazar, 2015: 213–214).

Thus, the radical opening created by the social movements of the revolutionary cycle closed with the ostensible implementation of their central demands, the nationalization of gas and the refoundation of the country through a popular constituent assembly. Through this process, social movements were redirected toward the state as a pressure point for change by the MAS via CONALCAM. This marked the transformation of offensive social movements with radical transformative horizons beyond the state to defensive movements protecting the social movement demands incorporated through technocratic means during the first years of the MAS government.

### INFORMAL CONTESTATION AND SPONTANEOUS REACTION (2010–2019)

The shift from offensive to defensive movements in political terms was, in a sense, the tip of the iceberg and reveals the ossification of movements through their formal relationships with the state. Government posts, instead of allowing social movements to direct the state from below, had perverse effects on their internal dynamics, transforming leadership roles into stepping stones to formal political careers. The strategic focus of organizations aligned with the government was turned away from the needs of their bases to those of the MAS. Unsurprisingly, this disconnect is a common complaint of social movement bases—even those most sympathetic to the MAS<sup>7</sup>—and a development that has not gone unnoticed by Bolivian political commentators. Oscar Vega, a onetime

ally of the government and a constituent assembly delegate (interview, La Paz, August 7, 2019), contends that

what becomes increasingly pronounced after 2010 is a separation between leadership and bases [within social organizations] that today [2019] is clearly evident. . . . There was a countercurrent in [2010] against the leadership, which was not the base's leadership. . . . The period after the promulgation of the constitution was one of survival, and social tendencies to conserve what had been achieved emerged. We entered a time when one had to look after what one had.

This conservative current, coupled with the separation of leadership from their bases, transformed organizations into empty shells, and as a result organizations ceased to be movements.

Whereas their radicalism had forced a more substantive incorporation of movements and their demands during Morales's first term, by 2010 the social organizations had been restricted to a *de facto* veto on policies through informal contestation. The reduced ability of social movements to propose and actively influence government policy before its implementation is reflected in the composition of the MAS cabinets during this period. By 2013, only four ministerial positions were filled by social movement leaders, with the rest drawn largely from the ranks of professional economists, university professors, and lawyers (Espinoza, 2015: 144–146).

The changing ministerial composition is symptomatic of broader shifts in the modalities of the second incorporation of popular sectors in Bolivia after 2010. As analysis by political scientist José Carlos Campero (2017: 15) demonstrates, the first few years were marked by approximately 500 conflicts annually, since social movements were incorporated into the state and aligned with the MAS, which fulfilled movement demands through state managerialism. The social conflicts over this period were those between the MAS government and the lowland departmental autonomy groups. These were largely confrontations between the indigenous rural and working-class social forces representing the government and the right-wing opposition from the lowland departments.

However, the defeat of the opposition after the Porvenir massacre and the compromise with certain sections of capital reduced confrontation between the government and the lowland opposition. This, coupled with the demobilizing tendencies within movements, meant that the government did not need the protection of those movements to the same extent after its 2009 electoral success and the imperative to implement movement demands waned. This was not an inevitable outcome of the relationship between social movements and the MAS but the result of the particular political context and modalities of incorporation of movements under Morales. The upshot of these dovetailing dynamics was a shift in the government's agenda away from that of its social base and the consolidation of its position in power, sparking an increasing number of social conflicts between indigenous peasant and working-class groups and the government (Campero, 2017: 15).

The first signs of a rupture between the government and its social base materialized in 2010 with the reemergence of long-standing disputes between communities in the departments of Oruro and Potosí over departmental boundaries



and control over natural resources (Fontana, 2013a: 34). The resultant conflict coalesced with the 2010 civic committee dispute in Potosí, when the local population demanded (and was to an extent granted) greater political autonomy. This was followed by the *gasolinazo* (big gas hit) in December 2010, galvanized by the International Monetary Fund–dictated removal of the national gas subsidy, which increased the price of transport fuel by 73–99 percent virtually overnight (Mokrani and Uriona Crespo, 2011: 122). Across the country protests organized by the neighborhood councils, the COB, and the transport unions erupted, demanding the annulment of the decree and the reinstatement of fuel subsidies (Fontana, 2013b: 205).<sup>8</sup> The protests forced the government to abrogate the decree a mere six days after its introduction, with Evo Morales using his New Year’s Eve message to reiterate his oath to “lead by obeying” (*La Nación*, 2011).

The *gasolinazo* marked the beginning of a difficult year for the MAS; there were approximately 900 conflicts in 2011. The COB continued on the offensive in early 2011 and won the concession of a 10 percent increase in the national minimum wage (Quiroga et al., 2012: 58). However, the most significant conflict of 2011 was that over the proposed highway through the Isiboro Sécore National Park and Indigenous Territory (Fabricant and Postero, 2015; Fontana, 2013a; McNeish, 2013), a conflict between the government and lowland indigenous groups led by the CIDOB that came to encompass cocaleros and colonists on the side of the government and urban popular and middle-class sectors on the side of the lowland groups and thus exemplified the changing terrain of social conflicts after 2010. It forced the MAS government to change its approach to the highway, promulgating a law protecting the park in October 2011 and arranging a prior consultation for December 2012. However, the driving force behind the conflict was Brazilian capital (the highway project was funded by the Brazilian Development Bank) rather than the social movements (Fontana, 2013a: 35). Popular social forces were unable to force the government to cancel the project, which received a new lease on life with Law 969 in 2017, giving a *de facto* green light to the construction of the highway through the park (Bolivia, 2017: Article 9).

Following these conflicts, the MAS used the second dimension of incorporation—the creation of parallel organizations—to nullify oppositional movements. From 2011 on, movements were positioned either as supporters of the MAS and beneficiaries of their policies or as oppositional movements to be (violently) repressed with no right to government or any other funds. After the lowland CIDOB broke from the ranks of government supporters, the MAS demanded new elections through an “extended commission,” effectively reducing the possibility of independent leadership. The treatment of the highland movement CONAMAQ after its break with the government was even more extreme, with a caucus of MAS supporters within CONAMAQ, assisted by the police, violently expelling the leadership from its La Paz offices (Webber, 2015). This incorporation tactic continued through Morales’s second and third terms (2010–2019), with the government’s approach to the 2019 conflict with the cocaleros in the Yungas (La Paz) mirroring that used to quash CONAMAQ. The government split the Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca de La Paz (Departmental Coca Growers’ Association of La Paz—ADEPCOCA), forming a MAS-aligned organization, and forcibly evicted the oppositional

leadership from its offices, again with police assistance (Pomacahua, 2019). By the end of Morales's time in power in November 2019, there were two CIDOBs and two CONAMAQs, as well as two FEJUVE–El Altos, two CSUTCBs, and two ADEPCOCAs.

The MAS incorporated the labor movement—a movement that is a shadow of its former self but still symbolically significant (McNelly, 2019b)—through a mixture of false promises and informal contestation. Despite its pro-labor discourse and concessions to labor during Morales's first term, the government's position toward labor hardened significantly after 2009 (Trujillo and Spronk, 2018: 141). In 2010, the government drafted a reformed labor law that, far from being progressive, would have further limited the power of the labor movement. It proposed the requirement of a two-thirds majority vote for strike action and stripping public sector workers of their right to strike and state financing of unions, a move that would have reduced union independence (Webber, 2011: 213–214). In response, the unions of factory workers, teachers, and health care workers forced the COB out on strike in May 2010, the first general strike under Morales (Trujillo and Spronk, 2018: 146). This marked a break in the alliance between the government and the COB that lasted for three years. In 2013 the COB launched a series of protests against the 2010 pension reform, demanding an increase in the average salary for retired workers from 70 percent to 100 percent and a lower retirement age for miners.

Although the COB realigned itself with the MAS in November 2013 and was subsequently offered a seat at the negotiating table for some of the major proposed government reforms, its ability to influence policy remained limited (McNelly, 2019b). Despite continuing negotiations, as of mid-2019 no new labor code has been agreed upon between the two parties, and pension reform remains an area of contestation. Moreover, the government has increasingly reneged on its previous agreements. Minimum-wage hikes and new health and safety regulation were excluded from contracts with Chinese companies for infrastructure projects, with workers being paid US\$64 a month, less than a quarter of the 2016 minimum wage (Valerio Ayaviri Lazaro, executive secretary, Builders' Confederation, interview, El Alto, July 7, 2016). Most serious, in a move that contravened many of the employment rights enshrined in the 2009 constitution, in May 2016 the government shut down the public textiles firm ENATEX. Many in the COB were worried that this maneuver would set a precedent and lead to the closure of other state enterprises, and in fact the postal company ECOBOL was shut down in June 2016. Despite national strikes of 24, 48, and 72 hours and meetings with government ministers, the COB was unable to reverse the factory closure.

As Silva (2018b) and Trujillo and Spronk (2018) highlight, the mantra “lead by obeying” is not an empty slogan for the MAS. However, as the discussion above demonstrates, while the social movements were able to force the MAS into technocratic concessions to movement demands through state managerialism during its first term, from 2010 on, reactive informal contestation became the dominant modality of state–social-movement relations. Movement demands no longer determined government policy, and an increasing number of conflicts emerged in response to government policy, with movements sometimes able to influence government policy retroactively.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this article has been to unpick the dynamics of the second incorporation of popular sectors in Bolivia. Building particularly on the work of Rossi and Silva, I have argued that Evo Morales's first presidential term was marked by the incorporation of social movement leaders and the technocratic implementation of social movement demands through state managerialism. I have identified three dimensions of movement incorporation: (1) co-optation of leadership from above, (2) the creation of parallel government-aligned social organizations, and (3) the propensity of social organizations to be co-opted. This third dimension is intimately connected to the broader incorporation of movements into the political project of the MAS through state managerialism. Two of the central demands of the radical social movements of the previous period—the nationalization of gas and the rewriting of the constitution through a popular constituent assembly—were fulfilled by the government, simultaneously ratifying the credentials of the MAS as a government of social movements and robbing the more radical sectors of their most effective mobilizing frames.

These processes of incorporation played out within a broader political conjuncture in which the MAS was forced to confront a belligerent right-wing movement drawn from the eastern lowland departments. In this context, the priority of movements was to protect the government from attack from its other flank and prevent the right-wing opposition from splitting the country in two. However, with the defeat of the opposition after the Porvenir massacre and the concessions made by the government to appease different sections of capital, the MAS was able to placate and subsequently enter into alliance with previously oppositional groups. From 2010 on, the political importance of its social bases diminished, while the ability of movements to organize independently from the government and influence the political project of the government waned. Social organizations were reduced to informal contestation to block government policies and lost their former capacity to force the incorporation of policy directives from below.

## NOTES

1. "Pink tide" has been used to describe left-wing governments in Latin America since the turn of the century.

2. "Offensive" is used throughout to mean "combative" rather than "unpleasant" or "insulting."

3. My Ph.D. project was concerned with the experiences of social organizations, and therefore most of my interviews were with activists and leaders from these organizations rather than state functionaries or politicians.

4. The colonizers are highland peasants encouraged to move to the agricultural frontiers in the eastern lowlands from the 1950s on.

5. The PU consisted of the CONAMAQ, the CIDOB, the CSUTSB, Las Bartolinas, the women's wing of the CSUTCB, the colonist settlers' union, the landless peasants' movement, the Assembly of the Guaraní People, the Block of Indigenous and Peasant Organizations of the Northern Amazon, and the Salaried Workers' Union of Santa Cruz (Garcés, 2011: 49).

6. New oppositional forces would emerge in the next phase of Morales's presidency.

7. Many of the participants in the School of Political Formation expressed this concern.

8. Sections of capital linked to agribusiness were also involved in the protests against the government.

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